OUR FAITH

Published by The Unitarian Christian Fellowship

Purpose:--"To diffuse the knowledge and promote the interests of pure religion, which, in accordance with the teachings of Jesus, is summed up in love to God and love to man."

VOL. 2 JANUARY, 1948 No. 5

Prayer

O God, Our Father, we turn to the holy thought of thy presence within us. We would be strengthened for duties, for sorrows, and for joys. We remember before thee what has been given to us to do and to bear, that by thee we may be led from the strength of prayer to the strength of life. In our human darkness we can trust that in thee is no darkness at all.

Our hearts are open that thy spirit may fill them. Our minds are open that our thoughts may be thy thoughts. Our souls look to thee that the strengthening and comforting power of the Great Soul may effect its divine change in us. Amen.

The Independent Church Of the Philippines

You ask me about the drawing together of the Independent Church of the Philippines and the American Episcopal Church. I regard your inquiry as a command to speak, as opportunity offers I must tell what little I know.

For an account of the liberalism of the Independent Church and its liturgy, try to get people to read my book, "The Philippines Calling." The Philippine life, we must remember, was terribly torn apart by the Japanese occupancy, with its tortures, its crushing of industries and the fearful poverty which continues, the destruction of many of our liberal churches, including the Manila Cathedral and the Manila Divinity School. Last winter the Episcopal Church in America announced its intention to raise money for Philippine relief. When you have suffered the horrors of hell, when the need of rebuilding your churches and educating your ministers continues to be appallingly imperative, surely the certainty of help is properly persuasive. Also, as everywhere else, the intellectual life of the Filipinos has become chaotic. For example, the former Archbishop, Mons. Fonacier, now almost unanimously deposed, has become a member of a central committee of Communists, and has denied his religious beliefs, and denies all hope of immortality. All this may have influenced great numbers of people within the Independent Church toward a more conservative attitude. We must remember also that the Independent Church always has been deeply theistic and devotional.

The Filipinos are a great people, I love them; if it shall prove that we have lost our opportunity to work with their Independent Church many religious liberals will grieve. This has been one of the greatest opportunities our free fellowship has ever had to foster liberal Christianity.

While the trend of events appears now to be determined, the situation is not yet wholly defined. One Church is profoundly Anglican; the other is profoundly Filipino—gloriously Filipino—perhaps the most Filipino of any institution in the Islands. What affiliation these two great Christian Communions can work out will be of importance to the entire world.

LOUIS C. CORNISH
(Former President, American Unitarian Association, Winter Park, Florida)

From the Philippines

Archbishop de los Reyes, Jr., writing to Rev. Edward Ohrenstein, has stated:

"I believe that the religious radicals (the secularists) have thrown out the baby with the bag. (Sic) It is high time to recover the baby and care for her. She is faith and hope in our invisible Father."

What Is A Unitarian?

Webster's **International Dictionary,** A. D. 1905, defines a Unitarian as "one who denies the doctrine of the Trinity, believing that God exists only in one person; a unipersonalist; also, one of a denomination of Christians holding this belief." That is all.

Webster's **New International Dictionary,** A. D. 1937, defines a Unitarian as "one who denies the doctrine of the Trinity, believing that God exists only in one person; a unipersonalist; also, one of a denomination of Christians holding this belief. The churches of the Unitarian denomination are congregational in polity, except in Hungary where they are organized under a bishop. They have never issued any authoritative confession of faith, one of their most distinctive principles being the right of private judgment in theological matters. They formerly differed widely among themselves, the conservatives holding a belief in supernaturalism and in various doctrines modified from those of the orthodox Trinitarian bodies; the radical school rejected supernaturalism. Later there came to be virtual unity on the broad basis of the doctrines of 'the fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, the leadership of Jesus, salvation by character, and the progress of mankind onward and upward forever' but the denomination now includes in its ministry as well as its membership a number of nontheistic humanists."

In that 1937 definition of a Unitarian, the last phrase is especially striking. It brings in the "nontheistic humanists," those humanists, that is, who do not believe that God exists. So! Those who do not believe that God exists have gotten themselves included among Unitarians, although Unitarians are, by definition, those who believe in God's existence and in His unipersonality!

Is Unitarianism Enough?

Many people stumble over the term **Unitarian-Christian.** They say, "I know I am **not** a Christian, as Christianity is defined by the orthodox and evangelical Christian churches, and therefore I do not see how I can be a **Unitarian** Christian."

But this is just the point. **Unitarian** Christianity is precisely that kind of free, liberal, rational and progressive Christianity which drops all the irrational and obscurantist dogmas of the old Christianity. Unitarian Christianity is **purified** Christianity—purified of the dogmas born of ignorance or superstition which have been laid over the gospel of Jesus to obscure him and pervert his teaching. Unitarian Christianity is, by definition, the religion **of** Jesus, rather than the religion **about** him—the religion which seeks to have the **"spirit of"** Jesus rather than beliefs about him.

Surely this is the most authentic note in all the history of our Unitarian movement. This was the birth-cry of Unitarianism—**Pure Christianity! — Rational Christianity!** This was the motif and gospel of the first fine enthusiasm of our movement: **Let us free Christianity of its false dogmas and Pauline perversions! Let us have the pure religion of Jesus!** This was the note sounded by Channing. This was and is our reason for being.

Surely no religious person could ever rightly feel that there is anything confining or restrictive about Unitarian Christianity! Surely this is the gospel of liberation and freedom! Surely the spirit of Jesus is sufficiently wide and free to include all genuinely religious souls! Surely this is the gospel which can be, and **is,** a universal religion!

But not so for those who are **not** religious! If a person does not share Jesus' deep faith in God, Jesus' divine compassionate insight into men as children of that God, Jesus' daily and instant faith in the power of prayer, and Jesus' strong faith in a life after death—that person will naturally feel that even purified Christianity, even Unitarian Christianity, is a restricting faith for him.

Therein lies the real issue before Unitarianism today. For there is a real attempt, under the guise of Unitarian Advance, to empty our Unitarian movement of all its Christian content, to discard or ignore what the spirit of Jesus clearly implies and requires in religious faith, and to substitute the term "Unitarianism" for "Unitarian Christianity."

It cannot be done. **Unitarianism, apart from its Christian roots, has no definable religious meaning at all.** And we are fast approaching that condition! Unless we change our emphasis, we shall quickly find ourselves merely a debating society, or an-

other ethical culture movement. By allowing humanism to develop within our midst, and by giving it our official sanction and blessing—with its frequent denial of the minimum essentials of Jesus' own religious faith—we have set up an impossible situation. There is hardly anything we can now affirm, religiously! The word "Unitarian" has lost any definable religious meaning.

That is why so many of us feel we must now re-affirm the historic faith of our Unitarian movement—Unitarian Christianity!

HARVEY SWANSON
(Minister, Church of Our Father, Lancaster, Pa.)

Our Larger Unitarianism

It has been said that Unitarians believe in the Fatherhood of God, the Brotherhood of Man, and the Neighborhood of Boston—these three, and the greatest of these is Boston. It is a good quip. But when you study the past history of our churches, you find that there was much to make people believe in the spiritual richness and beauty of the neighborhood of Boston, because there was here so much of what Emerson, referring to no church or sect, denoted by his lines: "For these were men, were unitarians of the united world, and, whereso-ever their clear eye-beams fell, they caught the footsteps of the Same."

Our Unitarian movement in this neighborhood a century ago was a little river, but it sprang from a high place and carried with it a great faith in God and man. It did not rise and flow from any barren and cold idea of God; it did not spring from any lower conception of the nature and character of Christ than was held by other churches. It sprang from the hill which affirmed the spiritual dignity and divine capacity of all human beings. So the little stream represented the pull of irresistible power; it corresponded to what an eminent man called "the unitary sweep of all things human into relation with all things divine."

There is something else we cannot help seeing, when we look back upon our past. The great teachers and leaders of the Unitarian fellowship did not think of themselves as being shut up to a little separate stream of their own. Indeed they did not think of it as a little stream at all. Why not? Because they did not think of it as being distinct from the vital and ever-reforming stream of Christian tradition. They claimed all that was good and true in the Christian tradition as their inheritance, their possession and inspiration. They considered Unitarianism to be, not a complacent, peculiar stream running all alone, but the current of a river greater than itself. There was a larger Unitarianism as well as a lesser. The Unitarian name could not be imposed on that larger tradition. No single name or church or age or country could confine it; but it was like a mighty Father of Waters, flowing from generation to generation through the Christian world—often checked and corrupted, but continually bursting forth anew. Our noble predecessors never dreamed of separating their faith from the main stream of religious inspiration and endeavor. They did not ask of any practice or doctrine the vexatious question: Is this Unitarian? They asked the greater question: Is this Christian, according to the simplicity and height and depth of Christ himself? They never tried to foist their own name on others. They never allowed their idea of Unitarianism to be that of a little sectarian backwater, or of a superior little pool. They felt that they had all the lessons and living power of Christian history, indeed of all religious history, at the back of them.

Nothing less than this should content us. On no shallower waters can we float great hopes for the future. If the general movement of our fellowship of churches has become either meager or fretful, it is evidence of a need to put ourselves again in the place indicated once by C. Gordon Ames of Boston, when he declared: "We do not separate from the best faith of the Christian world; but we seek to put ourselves in the very middle of the stream of power which has flowed down the ages, and in sympathy with that great human heart which broke on Calvary for the love of all souls."

VIVIAN T. POMEROY
(Minister, First Congregational Parish, Milton, Mass.)

A Free Church Must Be a Church

[A free church must be a church if it is to fill its purpose. As a church it should foster man's highest relation to the world, in thought, feeling, and deed. Moreover, in the use of freedom we need strong convictions and principles. Our Unitarian

Church is a free church. The men who gave our fellowship preeminence in the past century were men of faith in the religion of Jesus as summed up in love to God and love to man. For the spread of that faith they organized and maintained a free fellowship in which they did not impose a creedal test. Like them we welcome into membership with us "any who while differing from us in belief are in sympathy with our spirit and aims."

Today some leaders in our churches are abandoning theism, but many of us are sure that faith in God, as well as in man, should still go together with our freedom. Our freedom without faith in God, we are convinced, will not meet man's spiritual needs. Faith in God makes the world a home. The absence of faith in God makes man an orphan. Faith in God gives man a sustaining companionship through every experience of life. The lack of such faith leaves man with a sense of final helplessness against the ravages of time. We believe that ultimately what makes a free church is not alone the element of freedom, but also, and foremost, a conscious, living, loving relationship with the Infinite and Eternal Spirit in whom we live and move and have our being.]

ROY B. WINTERSTEEN
(First Church in Roxbury, Roxbury, Mass.)

To Believe in God

"To me, I confess, it seems a very considerable thing, just to believe in God; difficult indeed to avoid honestly, but not easy to accomplish worthily, and impossible to compass perfectly;—a thing not lightly to be professed, but rather humbly to be sought; not to be found at the end of any syllogism, but in the inmost fountains of purity and affection;—not the sudden gift of intellect, but to be earned by a loving and brave life. It is indeed the greatest thing allowed to mankind, the germ of every lesser greatness; and he who can say, "I have faith in the Almighty," makes a higher boast than if he could declare, "The Mediterranean is my garden, and mine is every branch that waves upon its shores, from the cedars of Lebanon to the pine upon the Alps."

(JAMES MARTINEAU, in "Endeavours After The Christian Life," p. 307.)

The Doubt

In Him we live and move and have our being.

I sought, in travail, to explain
  The universe with God left out;
And in my futile thought God said,
  I am the breath that speaks your doubt.

Ah, no, I said, there is no God;
  Chance moves the shadow on the dial;
And even as I spoke, God said,
  I am the voice of your denial.

There cannot be a God, I said,
  Since evil makes the world so sad;
And in the silence God replied,
  I am your thought of good and bad.

But how, I said, can God exist,
  When suffering racks man's heart and brain?
And speaking once again, God said,
  I am your pity for his pain.

Doubt me, deny me, if you will,
  I am the mind that thinks your doubt;
Explain creation as you may,
  Your logic cannot leave me out.

MARION FRANKLIN HAM
(Minister Emeritus of Reading and Waverly, Mass.)

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"OUR FAITH" is published monthly (except July and August) by The Unitarian Christian Fellowship, 27 Marlborough St., Boston 16, Mass. Mr. Theodore Browne, Chairman; Rev. Paul H. Chapman, 33 Glen Green, Winchester, Mass., Secretary.

Editor: Rev. Harvey Swanson, 538 W. Chestnut St., Lancaster, Pa.

Subscription price: $1.00 per year, payable to the Treasurer, Mr. Joseph E. Coulter, 101 Tremont St., Boston 8, Mass.

Contributions toward the expenses of "Our Faith" are gladly welcomed from all friends.

Extra copies of "Our Faith" in quantity may be secured, for distribution in local parishes, and for literature tables, from the editor, or from King's Chapel House, 27 Marlborough St., Boston 16, Mass.

Articles suitable for publication in "Our Faith" are welcome from all who wish to use these columns to express Unitarian Christianity.